

Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council (AIACC)

Monday, October 19, 2020

Alabama Industrial Development Training Center

The AIACC met on Monday, October 19, 2020, via Zoom (due to COVID-19 meeting capacity restrictions). The meeting was called to order by AIACC Chair Senator Cam Ward. Also in attendance were Council members: Commissioner Lynn Beshear, Commissioner Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw, Robert Caldwell, Tametria Conner, Dr. Erich Grommet, Dr. Heather Jones, Melanie Jones, State Superintendent Eric Mackey, Dr. Sarah O'Kelley, Darryle Powell, Constance Rice-Johnson, Dr. Justin Schwartz, and Senator Cam Ward. The following proxies were in attendance as well: Beverly Churchwell for Stephanie Azar, Diana Tullier for Barbara Cooper, Nancy Thomas for Lucian Cronkite, Wendi Glass for John Mascia, Yada Horace for Jim Ridling, Suzanne Bruton for and Chris Stewart. Also in attendance was Anna McConnell, State Autism Coordinator.

The minutes from the July 20, 2020 meeting were approved and adopted.

Chairperson Comments: Senator Ward recognized the recent loss of Dr. Fred Biasini. He worked at Sparks Clinics for many years, was a strong advocate, informed clinician and made contributions to the Autism and Early Intervention communities and beyond. He will be greatly missed.

Lead Agency Comments: Commissioner Lynn Beshear noted the passing of Dr. Fred Biasini and the loss that it brings. She also noted the work that has been done by the AIACC.

State Coordinator Comments: There are 5 AIACC Member positions available. Applications went out in the latest e-news and will be available on the website. The positions are: Adult with ASD 19 years of age or older (2 Vacancies), Service Provider (2 Vacancies), and Health Insurance Representative (1 Vacancy). The Regional Autism Networks' increased funding request is included in the DMH budget that goes to the Governor's Office. The AIACC is looking to partner with universities about data that has been collected through the RAN and DMH Autism Services. This is an opportunity to look closer at statewide autism data and can help inform future priorities. The AIACC chairs can ask questions of the data – a meeting is pending with this group to discuss next steps.

New Business:

0-5 Subcommittee: Sarah O'Kelley noted that this committee has been working to make sure children with known or suspected ASD are identified in the EI model. There has been system wide training for integral intervention practices that work for kids with ASD. The group is working on screening and identification strategies to identify children with ASD to make them eligible for services. COVID-19 has allowed for more tools to be used. Engagement has been promising statewide.

6-13 Subcommittee: Heather Jones noted that COVID-19 has affected special education and school aged children. Providing special education services in a virtual and socially distanced environment is very hard. There had been early discussion on the benefits of telehealth, and now it is a standard. AL Dept of Education will be providing training for teachers specific to ASD over the summer – the Autism Summer Academy.

14-20 Subcommittee: Erich Grommet reported that the subcommittee has continued virtual meetings, as were occurring prior to the pandemic. Server space has been identified and at Troy for the transition website, but it needs to be constructed. He thanked those who have served on this group. Resources were requested from the group with any knowledge of options for transition to adulthood resources. If you are aware of resources, email to Erich Grommet.

21+ Subcommittee: Anna McConnell noted, on behalf of Sarah Ryan, that the group is gathering baseline information about what other states provide to adults with ASD and what already exists in Alabama (based on RAN and ASA information). The group will continually adding to this information in regularly scheduled meetings to meet the outlined objectives. Because of the questions surrounding insurance coverage nationwide right now the group decided to table discussions in this area until these issues at the national level are resolved. Finally, the group has lost several members due to retirement and/or job changes so we welcome new members who might be interested in joining the subcommittee. Email Sarah Ryan to be added to the announcements for Subcommittee monthly meetings.

Diagnostics and Health: Justin Schwartz noted that the group has continued to meet. Telehealth has been a primary focus of attention – making sure those measures have appropriate insurance coverage during the COVID crisis and in the future. These measures allow children to be seen faster and increase access to diagnostic services. Other areas of focus include the diagnostic process across the continuum of care, as well as workforce capacity. Discussions regarding the DSM 5 based ability to provide documentation for a diagnosis of ASD has continued and yielded positive feedback from providers who have used it. The group is still looking at how to support community providers in this tool,

in partnership with the Regional Autism Network. Related to diagnostics and health, not related necessarily to the Subcommittee, Dr. Schwartz noted the need to better understand and combat disparities in care. It has been well documented that access and service provision among races and ethnicities. The Society for Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics has convened a new diversity, equity, and inclusion Subcommittee to look at issues and develop solutions. This may be something to consider within the AIACC as well.

Training and Education: Anna McConnell noted that training and education for both families and professional is important.

Regional Autism Network (RAN): Doris Hill noted that the RAN has met more since COVID than anytime before to address issues for collaboration with each other, ASA, and to meet identified needs of callers. The RAN partnered with ASA for drive through resource fairs and the development and maintenance of an ASA/RAN YouTube channel with topics relevant to requests received (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6kRepo9Nr9w3wHny8Be0aA>). Some have been in Spanish. A statewide database is being utilized and adapted to capture topics of calls. Themes of most referrals at the UA RAN were requests for referrals for diagnostics, behavioral therapy, residential care, special education services, and IEP/advocacy questions. The UA RAN worked with Brewer Porch, EI of West AL, AIDB, and Children's Hospital Behavioral Health. The UA RAN partnered with the Tuscaloosa Public Library to work on their autism resource collection. The USA RAN conducted 2 drive through resources fairs with ASA and DMH Autism Services in Mobile. They have also worked with pediatric practices to assist them with the DSM 5 Healthcare Provider Diagnostic Tool. Their Family Navigator has assisted numerous families in the IEP process. The AU RAN wants to host drive through resource fairs in the region. Many presentations have been hosted, to include CART program in Spanish and English, and the for the ABLE group. The AU RAN Family Navigator has been requested as a speaker for many classes to offer the parent perspective to students (special education, transition, public health, vet school, social work, etc. In many ways, outreach has been greater due to virtual connections. Many callers have requested translation services and residential placements. The UAB RAN noted the loss of Fred Biasini – he will be greatly missed and he was greatly invested in the program. He often attended the RAN meetings although many other things took his time. He provided valuable mentorship to Family Navigators. The UAB RAN moved to the School of Public Health and Lizzie (Griffith) Taylor reassumed the role of RAN Director as of October 1, 2020. There is a strong partnership with Sparks Civitan Clinics and will continue that partnership. The Community Education Workshops will continue virtual trainings. The UAB RAN is looking to add a Family Navigator as they have proven so valuable in other parts of the state.

Public Awareness: Melanie Jones noted that the Autism Friendly website framework has been created. The updated logo was created by adults with ASD. There will be videos from service providers about the importance of being Autism Friendly. Once this step is completed, the next step will be encouraging employment of individuals with ASD in these businesses.

Member Updates:

Heather Jones noted that there are 321 Licensed Behavior Analysts and 25 Licensed Assistance Behavior Analysts in Alabama. Applicants are now being licensed on a weekly basis rather than a quarterly basis because of the BACB's change from quarterly testing to on-demand testing. The application process will be moving to an online format. The website now includes a list of all licensees in the state.

Angel Loewen (Autism Society of Alabama) noted that ASA had received lots of calls and questions about private insurance coverage. They are looking at compiling data about this topic. If anyone has concerns (providers or families), the ASA will compile that information. You can email Angel with that as well. ASA has updated their [website](#). It contains information about Safety Week, resource fairs, conferences, YouTube channel, etc.

Beverly Churchwell noted there are 159 groups and individuals enrolled as vendors for ABA services in Alabama Medicaid. This is for the Chapter 37 services.

Anna McConnell noted that AL Dept of Mental Health is in the process of enrolling providers. There are approximately 25 providers in queue to be enrolled in Medicaid pending documentation. Enrollment occurs directly with [ADMH Office of Autism Services](#).

Member Updates:

Sarah O'Kelley noted that Fred Biasini's seat on the Council was for the UCEDD. It is expected that would move to Dr. O'Kelley's name. The LEND training program PI would be the same expectations. If there was participation from Dr. Biasini on previous activities and you have questions about how that looks moving forward, please contact Dr. O'Kelley.

Dr. Eric Mackey noted that ALSDE is requesting funding in the FY22 budget for a behavior analyst/specialist for each school district. While not all school districts are the same size, it is a big step in that direction. Dr. Mackey noted that ALSDE wants to support students with ASD and hearing

impairment. Many districts have BCBA's, but not all have specialists. He also noted that Tina Sanders is retiring and praised her work with children with special needs.

Commissioner Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw noted that Betsy Prince, Division Director of Early Intervention, has retired after 40 years providing services to children. Amy Blakeney, the former Assistant Division Director has taken on the Director position and worked with her for many years. Mary Beth Vick will continue to work on the 0-5 group with Dr. O'Kelley. Commissioner Burdeshaw expressed gratitude for the work and collaboration that has occurred in that Subcommittee. It will be written up in a national journal in the near future. She noted that EI referrals have been down during COVID, but are starting to rise again. More funding for the ASD population will be requested in the upcoming budgets.

Commissioner Lynn Beshear echoed Commissioner Burdeshaw on the seeing the progress and journey over the time she has been at DMH. She appreciated Dr. Schwartz's comments regarding early access to services and the impact it will have on their lives. She noted she met with someone from Florida at a Temple Grandin event. Florida has more extensive resources and asked if we had reached out to them. Anna McConnell noted that the Regional Network has replicated that program. In Florida, there are more treatment and diagnostic specialists, as well as more grant funding. Hearing that multiple state agencies are looking to serve those with ASD is exciting. Capacity will be something we need to work on and could be done with partnerships with universities like the RAN. Commissioner Beshear noted they have a more extensive website in Florida and would continue to be a good model.

Tina Sanders confirmed her retirement and noted her appreciation to working to serve those with ASD and the partnerships that have occurred. Elisabeth Newell will be stepping into much of the work Ms. Sanders was involved in. The Autism Summer Academy will be a weeklong training over the summer for teachers specific to ASD. From this pilot, the hope is that it will be offered in each of the Regional In-Service Centers. Partnership with the RAN has also been pursued. Sen. Ward expressed his thanks and echoed Dr. Mackey's comments about her service.

Dr. Schwartz expressed thanks to Dr. Mackey for pursuing behavior support in school systems. He would like to continue to advocate for getting providers to the right settings, but also keeping them there. Turnover in providers is a major issue, especially in those further away from population centers. Learning collaboratives may be a good way to maintain and continue to train the workforce.

Andrea Martin (UAB School of Medicine) noted an upcoming virtual trivia event that benefits autism research at UAB.

Erich Grommet noted that Troy University has an undergraduate and graduate ABA program. Questions may be directed to aba@troy.edu.

Maria Sahonic noted that she and Maria Gutierrez have been helping with the UAB area for translation and resource assistance. It is difficult for that who need translation services, particularly the Hispanic community, to access services when they cannot understand all that is going on due to language barriers. She also noted that services for adults are important and needs growth.

Anna McConnell noted that announcements are listed in the agenda and AIACC e-news.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Next meeting: Monday, January 25, 2021

Recording Secretary

A. McConnell